

## What must you do to prepare for your new fish?

You should research fish you want to purchase before setting up the tank and getting the fish, since you want to try to use the correct “furniture” in the tank and know what the temperature and space requirements are. Know the natural history of the species that interest you. With fish, homework upfront can help a family avoid unnecessary and sad losses. It is helpful to identify an aquatic veterinarian or, at a minimum, a veterinarian with some experience with fish, when you are considering obtaining fish. You can find an aquatic veterinarian by visiting [www.aquavetmed.info](http://www.aquavetmed.info) and looking for the list of aquatic veterinarians near you.

Taking home a sick fish is never a good idea. Even a healthy fish may be carrying parasites, bacterial, fungal or viral diseases. For this reason, new fish should be quarantined for at least a month before being introduced to your existing fish. This requires a separate tank set up. Not doing this may expose the fish you already have to diseases that may kill them. During this month, you should carefully observe the new fish. If it is doing well at the end of the month, there is less risk in introducing the new fish, however, it is never risk free. If it is not doing well, you should contact your aquatic veterinarian, who is the best person to advise you about health care for your fish.

## When you acquire a pet

*You accept responsibility for the health and welfare of another living thing. You are also responsible for your pet's impact on your family, friends, and community. A pet will be part of your life for many years. Invest the time and effort necessary to make your years together happy ones. When you choose a pet, you are promising to care for it for its entire life. Choose wisely, keep your promise, and enjoy one of life's most rewarding experiences!*

*For more information, visit,  
American Veterinary Medical Association  
[www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org)*

*Aquatic Veterinarian Information  
[www.aquavetmed.info](http://www.aquavetmed.info)*



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# Selecting a Fish



*Brought to you by your veterinarian and the  
American Veterinary Medical Association*

*Pets are an important part of the American household. Your pet-owning experience will be most enjoyable if you carefully consider which pet best suits your family, home and lifestyle. Unfulfilled expectations are a leading cause of pet relinquishment, so make an informed decision. Take time, involve your family, and give careful consideration to the following questions.*

## **What's special about fish and what choices do you have?**

More and more people are discovering that having a home aquarium brings color and amusement into their lives. Studies have shown that people watching fish tanks have lower stress levels. Fish are often ideal pets for people with space limitations or allergies to other common pets. They come in all shapes, sizes and colors and many fish seem to have individual personalities. Fish can be kept in small or large tanks of varying shapes and dimensions, and there are saltwater and freshwater species of fish. Some are kept outside in ponds.

Unlike the situation with dogs and cats, where one selects from among different breeds, the choices among fish species are much more extensive. What one type of fish requires may be unnecessary or even harmful to another. While beautiful to look at, keep in mind that some fish are venomous (for example the saltwater lion fish).

## **What are the special needs of fish?**

When considering a home aquarium, be aware that the health of a fish is directly related to the health of its watery environment. Maintaining good water quality is extremely important, whether you are taking care of your first goldfish or balancing a saltwater aquarium with fish and invertebrates. Beyond the importance of establishing filtration to remove waste products, many fish are sensitive to sudden water temperature changes. Even common household fumes and cleaners can impact their water quality. If fish are kept outside in ponds, it is important to make sure they are protected from temperature and environment extremes that can put their health at risk.

Fish need a balanced diet, clean water, appropriate light, and a suitable environment. Some fish require frozen or live food to remain healthy and happy. Good husbandry is the key to pet health. Pet fish can also become ill and may require surgery or other veterinary care.

Small fish grow to be large fish and outgrow home systems. Nurse sharks, for instance, are interesting and are often seen in aquarium stores, but they can grow to over ten feet in length! Seahorses, too, are beautiful and intriguing fish, but their dietary needs (typically live food) and exacting water quality needs make them an unwise selection for the novice. Many fine books are available to guide the budding home aquarium enthusiast.

## **Do fish fit your lifestyle and who will care for your fish if you are away?**

Keeping fish is a wonderful family activity. While families should involve their children in caring for fish, youngsters need the help of an adult who is willing, able and available to supervise the daily care of fish. Setting up a tank is a creative activity for everyone. Some people even employ services to care for their system and fish. Caring for fish is relatively easy when you travel. Depending

on how long you are gone, you may skip a feed day, have an automatic feeder or have a friend come in to feed your fish. If you are away longer, you will need a friend or a service to come care for the tank (water quality) as well as feed the fish.

Be aware, that there may be limitations placed by homeowners associations or landlords on the size of the aquarium permitted where you live. You may need additional renters' or homeowners' insurance to cover any water damage or losses associated with an aquarium.

Although uncommon, there is a human health risk to consider when keeping fish—mycobacterial infections can be transmitted by aquarium fish, and can cause skin infections. The risk of infections is higher for people whose immune systems are not fully functional.

If you find your fish is no longer an appropriate pet for your family, seek help in finding it a new home. Remember, never release a fish into the wild, whether in a neighborhood pond or into a wilderness area or local beach. It's not good for the animal or the native wildlife.

## **Where can you get pet fish and how affordable are they?**

Many fresh and saltwater species are being bred for the pet trade. More and more fish dealers are working with suppliers that certify that their collection practices have little impact on wild fish habitat and populations. Ask your fish dealer where your fish originated. Fish that are raised to be pets will likely be healthier and live longer, and their purchase supports sustainable practices. Breeders sell some fish directly, such as koi. If you are interested in koi, you can find a koi show near you to see what fish are available.

The cost, care and time commitment required for home aquariums varies as much as the individual characteristics such as color, size, and life span of fish species. The costs of the equipment to maintain the aquarium is often higher than the cost of the purchase of the fish. First-time home aquarists should avoid species that have complicated requirements. Freshwater systems are generally less expensive and easier to set up and maintain than saltwater ones.

Water quality test kits will help maintain water quality. Depending on the complexity, they can cost up to hundreds of dollars.

## **How can you select a healthy fish?**

It is good to visit pet stores a few times to assess the health of the animals in general. If you often see sick or dead fish in the tanks, it is probably better to move on and find ones that are more active. Generally you want a fish that appears to be behaving normally and has its fins spread. It should not be gilling (breathing) abnormally (you can compare the fish you are selecting with the tank mates). There should be no wounds. The eyes should be clear and it should have a normal weight. Sometimes you have to look at many fish of the same species to learn what is normal.